8 March 2007

English only

Commission on Population and Development
Fortieth session
9-13 April 2007
Item 2 of the provisional agenda*
Adoption of the agenda and other organizational matters

Reform of the Economic and Social Council

Note by the Secretariat

1. The present informational note on the status of efforts to strengthen the Economic and Social Council is prepared by the Secretariat in response to a request made by the Bureau of the fortieth session of the Commission on Population and Development at its third meeting on 16 January 2007.

2. On 20 November 2006, the General Assembly adopted its resolution 61/16 on the "Strengthening of the Economic and Social Council". The resolution, which built upon several previous resolutions of the Assembly,[1] reaffirmed the important role that the Charter of the United Nations and the Assembly had vested in the Economic and Social Council and recognized that the Council's role as the principal body for coordination, policy review and policy dialogue should be reinforced. The Assembly noted that it was also important to increase the effectiveness of the Council in promoting the implementation of and follow-up to the outcomes of the major United Nations conferences and summits in the economic, social and related fields and in working towards the attainment of the internationally agreed development goals, including the Millennium Development Goals.

3. To that effect, while the General Assembly decided to maintain the current segment structure of the substantive session of the Economic and Social Council, it decided, in accordance with the mandate given to the Council at the 2005 World Summit, to add two key components to the high-level segment of the session, namely, an annual ministerial-level substantive review and a biennial Development Cooperation Forum, to the existing components of the high-level segment, namely, the annual high-level policy dialogue with international financial and trade institutions on current issues in the world economy and a thematic discussion on a theme from economic, social and related fields to be decided annually by the

* E/CN.9/2007/1.

[1] In particular resolutions 50/227; 52/12 B and A/57/270 B.

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Council. The Assembly further decided that the outcome of the high-level segment would be one ministerial declaration.

4. The Development Cooperation Forum will be launched at the Council's substantive session of 2007 in Geneva. Starting in 2008, the Development Cooperation Forum will be held in alternate years in New York. It will review trends and progress in international development cooperation, give policy guidance and recommendations to promote more effective international development cooperation, identify gaps and obstacles to the realization of the internationally agreed development goals and make recommendations to address them.

5. With regard to the annual ministerial-level substantive review, the General Assembly decided that the review should be conducted by means of a cross-sectoral approach focusing on thematic issues common to the outcomes of the major United Nations conferences and summits in the economic, social and related fields. It would review progress made in the implementation of the outcomes of those conferences and summits and assess its impact on the achievement of the internationally agreed development goals. Also pursuant to Assembly resolution 61/16, the Council adopted a decision in which it urged the functional commissions to contribute, in accordance with their mandates and specificity, to such an assessment.[2] The Assembly further recommended that the Council establish a multi-year programme of work for the ministerial-level substantive reviews. The Council will start the consultations on that issue shortly.

6. The General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to prepare a report to inform the thematic discussion of the Council and an analytical background report for consideration by the Development Cooperation Forum, as well as for the annual ministerial-level substantive review. It requested that the reports include a concise, analytical section providing an assessment of progress, identifying gaps and obstacles in implementation and making recommendations to overcome them.

7. On 2 March 2007, the Council adopted the theme for the thematic discussion of its substantive session of 2007 as "Strengthening efforts at all levels to promote pro-poor sustained economic growth, including through equitable macroeconomic policies" and the theme for the annual ministerial-level substantive review as "Strengthening efforts to eradicate poverty and hunger, including through the global partnership for development".

8. On 15 January 2007, the Bureau of the Economic and Social Council held a meeting with the chairpersons of the functional commissions to consider how the functional commissions could strengthen their contribution to the work of the reformed Council in the light of General Assembly resolution 61/16. In particular, the meeting explored how the functional commissions could contribute to the annual ministerial-level substantive review, the biennial Development Cooperation Forum and the thematic discussion. Participants focused on three main issues:

(a) The guidance and actions expected by the commissions from the Council to improve policy coherence and help the commissions better target their contributions to the Council's work;

[2] Economic and Social Council decision 2006/274.

(b) Ways to increase interaction among the functional commissions to enhance coherence and synergy in promoting the United Nations development agenda;

(c) The possibility of adding a standing item to the agenda of each functional commission on its contribution to the work of the Council, especially regarding the theme of each annual ministerial-level substantive review.

9. The chairpersons of the functional commissions, including the Commission on Population and Development, pledged their full support to the strengthening of the Economic and Social Council and to cooperating with the Bureau of the Council in seeking ways to make useful contributions to the annual ministerial-level substantive reviews. There was general agreement that further guidance from the Council would be needed. It was also stressed that it was important for the Council to adopt a multi-year programme on the themes of the annual ministerial-level substantive reviews in order to enable each commission, within its mandate and specificity, the better to prepare and provide timely input to the work of the Council. Moreover, it was noted that the mandates and themes considered by the functional commissions varied in their relevance to particular themes considered by the Council and it was consequently recognized that not all the commissions would be able to contribute equally to a particular theme. The chairperson of the Commission on Population and Development explained that the programme of work of the Commission covered the topics contained in the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and that the Programme of Action would be the framework within which contributions could be made.